Concerning Holy Resolution.

A SERMON

PREACH'D before the

KING,

AT

Kensington, Decemb. 30, 1694.

PSALM 119. 106.

Old Translation.

I have sworn, and am stedfastly purposed to keep thy righteous Judgments.

New Translation.

I have sworn and I will perform it, that I will keep thy righteous Judgments.

By his Grace *THOMAS* Lord Arch-Bishop of *Canterbury* Elect.

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THESE are the Words of King *David*; and and the Saying is the more remarkable, by reason of the Condition of the Speaker: For, the more power, opportunity, temptation there is to break God's Commandments, the greater is the vertue of religiously observing them.

This Prince was a Debtor to the Law, as one who had entred into a Covenant with the God of *Israel*; he renew'd this Obligation as often as, by the hand of the Sacrificer, he presented an Offering to him. When he came to the Throne, he understood (no doubt) from the Book of God, to which he was no Stranger, that it was his Duty to write out a Copy of God's Law, and to keep it by him, and to read in it, at convenient Seasons all the days of his Life; *Deut.* 17. 18, 19. in order to his better observing the Contents of it. He was in many troubles, *Psal.* 132. 1, *&c.* and those troubles, (both Publick and Private) were, also, exceeding great; and he made many solemn Promises to that God who could alone support, comfort and deliver him; and by these he strengthened his Obedience. Of such Holy Resolutions he hath given some ac-

count in the Words of the Text, Saying, *I have sworn and am stedfastly purposed to keep thy righteous Judgments.*

In this Pious Declaration are contained four things well worthy our notice.

First, Herein is taken for granted a possibility of keeping the Law of God. That is, according to the measures of a sincere Man, and by the assistance of God's grace; for without him we can do nothing. *David* was a Man of better Understanding, then to take an impossibility upon him; and of greater Piety then to assume to himself a power of doing that which was righteous, and, in its nature, possible, without the help of his God.

Secondly, We have here supposed the eternal Equity of God's Commands, which are called Righteous Judgments; they being the Results, not of the Arbitrariness, but the Counsel of his Will.

Thirdly, Here is further suggested the Rule by which Wise and Pious Men go in making Vows. They do not rashly oblige themselves to things either doubtful or unlawful, or if lawful, inexpedient: But they proceed upon sure grounds, vowing and resolving to perform such things as God himself has enjoyned in his Righteous Judgments or Statutes.

Fourthly, The Royal *Psalmist* does here expresly set forth a most serious and fixed Resolution of obeying these possible, these just and reasonable Laws of that God whose Wisdom and Clemency are equal to his Power. *I have sworn and am stedfastly purposed, to keep thy Righteous Judgments.*

I have chosen the last of these four Points for my present Subject, designing to discourse (by God's Assistance) concerning Holy Resolution, and the strengthning our selves by it in our religious Duty. And,

In the first place I shall enquire into the Nature of Resolution, Then,

Secondly, I shall shew how useful, how necessary a stedfast Holy Purpose is in the Course of our Lives.

Third-

Thirdly, I shall conclude with a hearty exhortation to this Practice; endeavouring so to move you to it, that you being true to your Religious Obligations, may finally obtain the Fruit of the exceeding great and precious Promises of that God, and that *Sun of Righteousness, with whom there is no variableness nor shadow of turning*.

First, For the Nature of Resolution, it may be described as an Act or Habit of the Mind, as determined with strength vigour and steddiness towards some Object, concerning which it was formerly doubtful, or towards which it was either indifferent or averse. It is the application of the Will to Business, in the Opinion of some Moralists. It is the bent of the Mind which setteth on work the other Powers. It is as it were the Seal of the Inclination. St. *Peter* seems to describe it as the fortifying of the Soul, in these Words, *Forasmuch as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, Arm your selves likewise with the same mind*, 1 Pet. 4. 1. or, with the like force of Holy Resolution. Resolution consider'd in it self, is neither good nor evil; but it is either according to the matter and the degree of it. It is of a like Nature with Zeal, which, so long as it is exercis'd in a good matter, and with due temper, is very commendable and useful; but, in a bad Cause, it is a most pernicious Instrument; and, like Fire in an undue place, the more it rageth, it is the more destructive.

The Resolution which I am to recommend, hath Religion for its Object, and Discretion for its Temper. To be peremptory in a Trifle is great folly and weakness; to be resolute in any Brutal way is high Impiety. To be moved by the Reason of the Case is just compliance; To be stedfast and unmoveable in our Duty to God, and others and our selves, is Resolution truly and properly so called.

To such a sort of Resolution there are several Distempers in the Mind, Will and Affections which oppose themselves.

The first is Slightness, Carelesness and Indifferency of temper, which causeth so little regard to be had to Persons or things, even those of the greatest moment, that it neither setteth the Heart upon them or against them. Such was the disposition of *Gallio the Deputy of Achaia.* Acts 18. 17. Though he was a Man in Authority, and acquainted with the Riot of which the *Greeks* were guilty in the Case of *Sosthenes*, yet he cared for none of these things.

The Second is, *Hesitancie* and doutfulness of Mind, a kind of *halting betwixt God and Baal*; a Spirit not wrought up to that pitch of Resolution, to which the Prophet *Elijah* would have the purpose to rise, in his Expostulation with the double minded Men of his time: *how long halt ye betweene two Opinions? If the Lord be God follow him, but if* Baal, *then follow him.* 1 Kin. 18. 21.

A Third opposite is Fickleness and Instability; an humour which abounds where the Imagination governs, that being pleas'd not so much with things that are really good, as with those which are new. Thus some of the *Israelites* affected Novelty in Worship more than the *Heathen* themselves. This mov'd the Prophet to upbraid them on this manner, *hath a Nation changed their Gods, which are yet no Gods? but my People hath changed their Glory for that which doth not profit.* Jerem. 2. 11.

A Fourth Distemper is easiness of Disposition, and good Nature, commonly indeed, but very falsly so called. The Persons whom God hath formed out of the softer Clay, go on tollerably well when they are left to themselves, but they are soon drawn aside by the ordinary perswasions of others, and much more by their Importunities. Some gentle Entreaties, and seemingly kind, but deceitful Words, bring them off from their Judgments and good Purposes. One of these easie Persons is the simple one described in the Seventh Chapter of the *Proverbs. The Harlot with her much fair Speech, caused him to yield; with the flattering of her Lips she forced him. And he went after her straightway, as an Ox*

goeth

goeth to the Slaughter, or as a Fool to the Correction of the Stocks. Prov. 7. 7. 21, 22.

A Fifth Distemper which hindreth Resolution, is Weakness and Faintness of purpose, whence divers express themselves in Phrases of desire rather then of bent and fixedness of mind. They say, we wish, we would be glad to have it so; but there are not Nerves strong enough in their Hearts to cause them to protest, (tho' in a good and necessary matter) that they are resolv'd, and peremptorily determined. *Agrippa* is represented, in the *Acts* of the Apostles, (*Acts* 26. 28, 29.) as a Man of such a temper. *He said unto Paul* (who spake with a force of Evidence not to be resisted by a teachable Mind) almost thou perswadest me to be a Christian. To whom that Apostle thus dextrously apply'd himself; *I would to God that not only thou, but also all that hear me this Day, were both almost and altogether such as I am, except these Bonds.*

Sixthly, Nigh to the Nature of the forementioned Evil, is that of Fearfulness and Cowardice, in reference to the Difficulties which Men must go thorough, if they will enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. Men in whom this Passion ruleth, start out of the streight way, as soon as they espy the Cross, tho' it be at some distance from them. They do indeed take up a Resolution, but it is to go no further then they shall be attended by Ease and Safety; by worldly Pleasure, Profit and Honour. When Persecution ariseth by reason of the Word or Gospel of Christ, *by and by they are offended.* They stumble at the Affliction, and forsake a good Cause rather than suffer for it.

Lastly, there is a temper, which (it is true) is a pretence to Resolution, but it is as different from it as those others which I have named; that is to say, Wilfulness, Stubbornness or Perverseness, which maintains the same stiffness, be the matter what it will. This ariseth partly from sowerness in the frame of the Body, partly from Ignorance which first blindeth Men, and then makes them confident in a false way;

and partly from Pride which is very assuming and dogmatical, and will not suffer a Man either to see his Mistake, or, when it is seen by him to own it: of this refractory, stomackful and restive Humour were divers Jews in the days of *Jeremiah*, who were resolute without Reason, saying, *We will certainly do whatsoever thing goeth forth out of our Mouth, and yet every thing which proceeded out of it was far from being Oracle*, Jer. 18, 12. c. 44. v. 17.

Hitherto I have consider'd the Nature of Resolution, and those Distempers in the Faculties, Passions, and Tempers of Men, which are Enemies to it.

It is time in the

Second place, To bring under our Consideration, the usefulness and the necessity of such purposes as are both wise and holy, firm and stedfast in the course of our Lives, in order to the obtaining the end of our hopes, the Salvation of our Souls.

Here then I lay down these two things.

First, there is great power and strength in Resolution.

Secondly, We have need of all the Assistance that it can possibly give us, towards the performing of our Duty.

In order to that, there is great Force in the Resolution which is Natural, and much more in that which is Moral and Religious.

First, There is great Force in that kind of Resolution which is but Natural.

This appears from Experience, which shews us daily, that the resolute discourage all others; and are by nothing discouraged themselves.

This is also shew'd by the very Nature of Resolution before explain'd; for it is the Fortitude of the Mind in executing its Designs; it knitteth those Powers of it, in which, before, there was a luxation. It is certain that there is great Difficulty oftentimes in resolving, but when we are once resolved, our Trouble is well nigh over. The main point is gained when we have gained the Will. The Wall of *Jerusalem* (saith the

Book

Book of *Nehemiah*) *Neem.* c. 5. went forward because the People had a mind to the work. We are at first like Children who stand trembling upon the brink of a River; they desire to step in, but they fear to do so; and no sooner have they done it, but the Fear vanishes, and Refreshment and Pleasure succeed.

Likewise, the power of Natural Resolution is manifest, from that Reverence which every Man has naturally for his own Mind; I mean every Man who is not become brutish by evil Custom, and in whom the very Ruins of understanding are not perished. An uneasiness arises in the Minds of those who deliberately break their own measures, and live in a War with their own Judgments and Purposes. St. *Paul* complaineth of the wretchedness of his Estate, *Rom.* 7. 19. whilst his Affections and Appetites did in such sort over-rule the purposes of his Mind, than the good which he would do that he did not, and the evil which he would not do, that he did. There is naturally more greatness in the Mind, than to be willing solemnly to give it self the Lye, to make Promises to it self, and then presently to break them. Stedfastness therefore is many times the effect of holy vows and purposes, because it is pain and grief to the Mind to be a daily witness of its own Instability, to blush as it were, before it self, and to be condemned by its own Evidence, in its own Tribunal.

Again, The Strength of Natural Resolution does in some sort appear from the tender sense men have of their Reputation. Their good Name is dear to them, and a point of Honour is that on which they naturally insist: Now all VVeakness is dishonourable; and to vow and resolve, and by and by to violate such Vows, argues a weakness in the Judgment in resolving without good ground, or a weakness in the VVill and Temper, in not prosecuting that which was on good ground, stedfastly purposed. VVhere this Infirmity (if I may call it by so soft a Name) is understood, it brings a Man presently to shame and contempt. Now

Now if there be so much force in the Resolution which is natural, there may be much more in that which is Moral and Religious. Even where the Conscience is deprav'd in some degree, but not wholly wasted; such as have made holy Vows, and are willing to break them, would, notwithstanding not seem to break them, either to themselves or to the World; they would not directly cut the Knot in sunder, but chuse to untie it, by putting a new sense upon the words, by using some subtle Distinction, by having recourse to Equivocation, mental Reservation, or some other evasion suggested by the Sophistry of a deceitful Heart; not being able to endure the sting of a downright Reflection.

Where the Conscience remains pure and undefiled, Holy Men are still, with more true strength, assisted in their Duty by their Religious Purposes.

For *first*, such have a mighty veneration for the great God, and fear to trifle with so sacred a Majesty, by taking up his Name in vain, by a frequent change of yea into nay, by vowing and resolving and then disannulling. Insomuch that the weaker sort of sincere Christians do dread to break a Vow, even because it is a Vow, though hastily made, and with inadvertance chusing rather to be Martyrs to their own indiscretion, than to depart from that Promise which they made in the heat of their zeal, the Name of him before whom they tremble, the ever lasting God, Faithful and Just, *the same to day, yesterday and for ever.*

Secondly, Religion is the highest Principle by which Men can act; there is therefore in holy Resolution the greatest strength. The Religious have for their scope the best and highest Ends and Interests, the glory of God, who is the chief Good, the benefit of all reasonable Creatures, the present and everlasting happiness of their Persons; and true Religion is a certain way to these blessed Ends. 1 *Tim.* 6 9. Now if they that will be rich in this World, decline no Labours, run all man-

manner of Hazards, are not discourag'd by Rocks and Shelves, by Waves and Tempests, or Pirates in effect as dangerous as they; whilst they aim only at things temporal, which perish in the using; shall not those have greater courage, and firmer resolution, who propose to themselves the obtaining *Treasures* which fade not away and may fully depend upon the promises of God in well-doing, and on the grace of his blessed Spirit for the enabling them to do well, if they are not wanting to the power already given them?

Obj. But I expect that it should be objected, That all this sort of reasoning, if it be admitted to be specious, is notwithstanding false. For (as they may continue to speak) the purposes of Mankind are vain and uncertain. They vanish as the Morning dew upon the glittering of a new Temptation. Is it not daily observ'd, that divers who are in danger of death, and dread to go forth into a vast Eternity, after having led immoral Lives do weep and pray, and make many Protestations of becoming new Men, if God shall be pleased to spare and restore them? And when God has restored them, the World has been convinc'd that all their tears and prayers and promises, were the effects of fear; and they have return'd at once to their Health, and to their Vices.

To this it may be answer'd.

Answer. First, That if Men will not be altogether Christians by the help of holy purposes, they will be much less such without them. If there is not force enough perfectly to amend the Lives of Men, yet however they are some check and restraint to them. And he who says a Cord is strong, does not pretend to say that it is impossible to be broken.

Secondly, Those Men who are so false to their Vows, and so unstable in their ways, are to be thought not to have built their purposes upon a right Foundation. Perhaps the Foundation wanted Breadth. It may be, they resolv'd against many Sins, but not against that

which.

which did most easily beset them, and was most agreeable to Flesh and Blood. And this one evil Spirit left in possession, may have brought back all the rest.

Perhaps the Foundation wanted Firmness, they might take up their Resolutions in the heat of their Affection, which is suddenly kindled, and suddenly dies away.

But, for such as have hated every Evil way, and upon the most mature deliberation, dedicated themselves, Souls and Bodies to Christ, without any reserve, it is not likely that they should be so unsteddy, and so much given to change for the worse. Among the Primitive Christians there were Armies of Martyrs, who were faithful to the Death. *Pliny* * reproach'd them as obstinate, but their perseverance arose from the strength of their Faith, the Heartiness of their Love, their sincere Resolution to keep their Baptismal Vow, in despight of the World, the Flesh, and the Devil; and (that which made all these effectual) the extraordinary Grace of God.

Now if there be any Strength in natural Resolution, and more in that which is moral and Religious, (and more still there must be when one is added to the other certainly 'tis our Wisdom to bind our selves with this double Cord; for we have need of all the Assistance we can possibly get, and that is a second Consideration.

We come into the World with sensual Inclinations. Our natural Passions are apt to move with intemperate Violence. Our Lusts and Appetites, till Reason and Grace subdue them, are strong and impetuous. Our Mind is generally speaking, over-grown very early with the prejudices and indiscretions of youth; we are first accustomed to Folly and Vanity, before we are acquainted with Christian Piety, and Solid Vertue; and to many ill Customs we are united, as the Soul is to the Bo-

* *Plin. lib.* 10. *Ep.* 97. *Pervicaciam certe & inflexibilem obstinationem debere puniri non dubitari.*

ly with a very intimate Union, though we know not how. Our Senſes and Fancy treaſure up many idle, extravagant, and deceitful Images. This World being preſent hath great influence upon our Senſe and Imagination, whilſt *Faith is the Evidence of things not ſeen.* All places abound with evil Men, who live *without God in the World*, and who by hurtful Perſuaſions, and bad examples, entice the unwary into a wicked confederacy with themſelves; and there are Legions of *ſpiritual Enemies*, who envy God the Glory, and Man the Happineſs of a ſober, righteous, and godly life.

Wherefore, in ſo many and ſo great perils, amidſt which the frailty of our Nature is apt to ſupplant our Faith, it behoves us to uſe all manner of good means (and therefore that amongſt others that of holy Reſolution) that by God's Bleſſing upon ſuch Inſtruments, we may be ſupported in all Dangers, and carried ſafe through all Temptations. To the ſpeedy uſe therefore of a holy purpoſe, I proceed in the

Third Place, to exhort you, beſeeching you as *Barnabas* did thoſe of *Antioch*, *that with full purpoſe of Heart you would cleave unto the Lord*; Acts 11. 15. the Lord Jeſus Chriſt. It is true, as to the general end of Man, which is his Perſonal Happineſs, there is no need of any vehement Perſwaſive to it; no great need of deliberation and Reſolution of Mind. Nature it ſelf hath fix'd and determin'd this point, that it is as neceſſary to be happy, as it is to be at all. But Mankind is not ſo ſtedfaſtly reſolv'd upon the means as the end. Divers would be happy hereafter as Angels and Saints, and yet live here as Beaſts. But without a Holy Purpoſe, and a ſuitable Performance, *no Man ſhall ſee the Lord.* Take therefore to you Words, and ſay with *Joſhua*, *as for me and my Houſe we will ſerve the Lord.* Joſh. 24. 15. Uſe the Language of *Balaam*; but let it proceed out of a more righteous Heart: *If any one would give me his Houſe full of Silver and Gold, I cannot go beyond the Word of the Lord my God, to do leſs or more.* Numb. 22. 18.

28. With *Caleb* and *Joshua* follow the Lord wholly, and you will enter into a better *Land of Promise* than they at first did. *Engage your Hearts to approach unto the Lord*, and he will draw nigh unto you, and make what you do to prosper.

In purposing on this matter, be pleased to observe these few Directions:

First, When *Difficulties* in Religion discourage you, oppose *Necessity* to them, saying, Let come on it what will, we *must* serve God, we *must* save our Souls. Jer. 30. 31. It must be confessed, that when those who have been enchanted with sinful Pleasures, begin to think of reforming themselves, there is a great strife betwixt the Flesh and the Spirit, and they are ready to think they cannot by any means get the Victory, and they cry out with Anxiety, and say, *Men and Brethren, what shall we do?* What should they do? Doubtless they should encourage themselves in God, who is greater than those who are against them, and will come in to their Aid, if they pray to him, and repeat their Holy Vows in sincerity of Heart. It cannot be denied, but that the first Steps in our Ascent towards Christian Perfection are very laborious; but in due time we shall make good Progress if we faint not. S. *Paul*, when at first he found his Mind struggling betwixt Grace and Nature, cried out as a Man in great distress, who shall *deliver me from the body of this Death?* Rom. 7. 24. Yet at length the Grace of God did carry his Resolution to such a Degree of Power, that he chang'd his Complaint into the Triumph of these Words, *I can do all things through Christ, who strengthens me.* Philip. 4. 13.

Secondly, In all *Temptations* maintain such a Presence of Mind as may enable you to reflect upon the Resolutions which you have formerly taken up against

them. Commune with your own Hearts after this manner. Is not this the very Evil which, upon due Consideration, we have so often vow'd to forsake? How can we thus contradict our selves? How shall we do this great Wickedness, and sin against our Conscience, our Baptismal Engagement, our Righteous Purposes, and our Holy, Just God, who keepeth his Promise for ever.

Thirdly, When you have taken a Resolution to lead a more Christian Life, abstain, at least for a time, from the familiar *Conversation* of such who account it a Crime not to be dissolute, and endeavour, by mockery, to discourage all Seriousness in Religion. The prophane and scurrulous Breath of such Men, who are of a party for Vice, may drive back again that Disease, which was coming forth by Confession and Repentance.

Fourthly, Think frequently of the solemn Vow, Promise and Profession which you made in *Baptism*, and renew it often in the Holy *Communion*. By it all worthy Partakers are *strengthned* and *refresh'd*.

Lastly, Say not, all this we will do, though not now, yet in a *convenient Season*. It may be that convenient Season will never come; for *who knows what a Day may bring forth*? How foolish are such, and ignorant, who say in effect, We *resolve* to be good, but not till it be more difficult to be so; not till Custom in Sin hath hardned our Hearts, and stiffned our Necks into Inflexibility? *O ye Sons of Men, how long will ye love Vanity, and seek after Leasing*? Imitate rather Holy *David*, and attend to his Words in the 119th Psalm; *I thought on my Ways, and turned my Feet unto thy Testimonies. I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy Commandments. I have said*, (or fully determined) *that I would keep thy Words.*

Finally,

Finally, Let us pray unto Almighty God in some such Words as these; Lord, we believe; Lord help our weak Belief. Lord, we resolve; Lord strengthen our Holy Resolutions. And, as by thy Grace preventing us, thou dost put into our Hearts good Desires and Purposes; so, by thy continual Help, make us able to bring the same to good Effect, through Jesus Christ our Lord; to whom with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be all Honour and Glory now and for ever. *Amen.*

F I N I S.